

# HOW TO MAKE A GOOD CONFESSION

Sacramental confession is no formality. It is a decisive stage in the long process of our **moral conversion**. It is the key to peace of mind and improvement. But, in order to obtain these benefits, we must be clear about some fundamental truths and apply them to our personal situation.

## FUNDAMENTAL TRUTHS

1. God loves us immensely and wants our eternal happiness.
2. We can enjoy this eternal happiness only if we use our freedom to live according to His will.
3. Any refusal to behave according to God's will is a **SIN**, the gravity of which depends on:
  - the action that we do or omit,
  - our degree of awareness, our intention and degree of freedom, and
  - the circumstances.
4. As a refusal to respond to God's love, sin is an act of ingratitude, pride and rebellion against Him.
5. Whenever we sin we turn away from God, and we give ourselves or other creatures the attention and love that should be directed to Him alone.
6. In so doing we cause a damage to ourselves and others because we upset the order established by the Creator.
7. In His divine love, God is always willing to forgive us. He actually never ceases to call us back to Him and to proper behavior.
8. If we want to enjoy God's forgiveness, we must respond to His invitation to:
  - stop sinning,
  - abandon situations of sin, and
  - return to Him with a contrite heart.
9. We must also seek His forgiveness *through the ministry of the Church*, according to Jesus' mind when he gave the Apostles the power to forgive sins (*see Jn 20:22f*).
10. The reception of God's forgiveness through the sacrament of Penance brings about in us

a real *spiritual resurrection*: we rise again to a new life of grace. Through this sacrament we are reconciled with God, with the Church, with our neighbor and with ourselves.

## STEPS TO BE TAKEN BEFORE GOING TO CONFESSION

The most important thing is not to “*go to confession*,” but “**to make a good confession**,” i.e.,

- a) to approach this sacrament sincerely sorry for our sins;
- b) to confess them in all humility and honesty;
- c) to be ready to make amends for them;
- d) to be determined to avoid committing sin in the future, and to live according to God’s will.

In order to do all this, an essential step is to make a thorough **examination of conscience**.

This includes:

- a) becoming aware of the *gravity* and *number* of one’s sins, either in *thoughts*, *words* or *deeds*, whether they consist in something wrong that we have *committed*, or in something good that we should have done and which we failed to do (sins of *omission*);
- b) realizing that, by our sins, we have offended God, have renewed the cause of Jesus Christ’s suffering and death, and caused harm to our neighbor and ourselves.

Valuable helps in making a good examination of conscience are:

1. prayer to the Holy Spirit for enlightenment and sincerity;
2. reading of some pertinent Scripture passage which helps us rediscover the gravity of our sinfulness, the greatness of God’s love for us and his readiness to forgive us;
3. going over sets of questions concerning our duties to God, our neighbor and ourselves.

## PRAYER BEFORE MAKING THE EXAMINATION OF CONSCIENCE

Come, Holy Spirit, into my soul  
and help me know my sins,  
feel sorry for them, and confess them humbly,  
that I may be able to enjoy  
the Father’s forgiveness.  
By your light illumine the darkness of my mind,  
by your fire warm my cold heart,  
by your grace fill me with your love and power.

May I realize the wrong that I did  
and the good that I failed to do.  
Help me feel truly sorry for all my sins,  
strengthen my determination to avoid them  
in the future,  
and to live in your love, your peace and your joy.  
Amen.

## BIBLICAL PASSAGES TO BE READ

Before the examination of conscience, select and read just one of the following:

### Old Testament

Is 1:16-18; Jer 3:12b-14a; Ez 18:23.30b-32;  
Sir 28:2-7

### New Testament

Mt 5:17-19; Mt 5:20-24. 27-48; Mt 7:1-5;  
Mt 25:31-46; Lk 15:1-7; Lk 15 :11-32;  
Lk 19:1-10; Jn 20:19-23; 1 Cor 13:1-7; Eph  
4:17-20.25-32.5:1-7; Eph 5:1-7; Eph 5:8-  
15.19.20-21; Phil 4:8-9; Col 3:1-10; Col  
3:12-17; Col 3:18-21; Rev 3:20

Reflect prayerfully on the Word of God you have just read.

## GRID FOR THE EXAMINATION OF CONSCIENCE

There are several ways to make a good examination of conscience.

A rather common one consists in reviewing our life in the light of the **Ten Commandments** and see *if, how often* and *how gravely* we have failed to keep them.

Another way consists in reflecting on the **basic Christian virtues** (e.g.: faith, hope, love of God and neighbor, patience, purity, honesty, etc.), and see if we have practised them or not.

There are also other ways to make an examination of conscience, but what is **essential** is to *place ourselves in the presence of Almighty God and ask ourselves, in total honesty, if He is pleased with us, and if not, why?*

### Preliminary Questions

- When did I make my last confession? Was it a “good confession”?
- Did I make any special promise to the Lord on that occasion?

Did I keep that promise?

- Did I commit any grave or mortal sin since my last confession?



## QUESTIONS BASED ON THE TEN COMMANDMENTS

### 1. You shall have no false gods before me.

- Is God the most important reality in my life?
- Did I entertain doubts about my Catholic faith?
- Did I read books or watch shows/movies against my Catholic faith?
- Am I superstitious? Do I believe in fortune-telling, astrology, palm-reading, witchcraft?
- Have I always trusted in the Lord, especially in the midst of adversities and trials?
- Are there any “minor gods” in my life: money, pleasure, success, popularity, power? . . .

### 2. You shall not take the name of the Lord your God in vain.

- Did I use the name of God disrespectfully?
- Did I curse?
- Did I keep the promises I made to God?
- Did I speak disrespectfully of Jesus, Mary and the other Saints?

### 3. Remember to keep holy the Lord’s Day.

- Did I participate devoutly and punctually in the Sunday Mass?
- Did I pray regularly every day, at least in the morning and the evening?
- Did I read some passage from Sacred Scripture every day?
- How interested am I in knowing my faith better and helping others (including my friends, officemates/classmates and relatives) do so?

### 4. Honor your father and mother.

*(For children)*

- Did I fail to show love to my parents and other relatives?
- Was I disrespectful or disobedient to them?
- Did I help them when I could?
- Did I disappoint them? How?
- Did I respect my teachers, my parish priest and other persons in authority?
- Did I respect the rules of my school?

*(For parents)*

- Did I raise my children with selfless love and real concern?
- Was I too hard or too lenient with them?
- Did I give them bad example in the way I spoke or acted?
- Did I fail to lead them with my good example?
- Did I see to it that my children get the proper religious instruction and are actively involved in our Christian community and organizations?
- Did I motivate them for a committed life in the Church and society?

### 5. You shall not kill.

- Did I hurt anybody with my words or actions?
- Did I refuse to help people in need when I had the opportunity and the means to do so?
- Did I spread negative rumors about others?
- Did I give bad example?  
Did I do my best to make up for it?
- Did I keep grudges?
- Did I apologize promptly and sincerely?
- Was I instrumental in leading others to sin through my words or actions?
- Was I respectful of other people’s opinions and beliefs?
- Did I take anybody’s life?
- Did I cause any physical injury or moral loss to others?  
Did I do my best to make up for it?
- Did I enroll in any violent organization?
- Did I approve or consent to, recommend, seek or actively take part in abortion?
- Did I contribute to the pollution of the environment?
- Did I take care of my physical and mental health?
- Did I smoke, drink immoderately, use harmful drugs, or do anything that harms my health or the health of others?

### 6 & 9. You shall not commit impure actions. You shall not covet your neighbor’s wife.

*(For all)*

- Did I look at immodest pictures, shows, films . . . or read books and other publications that arouse in me sexual fantasies and may lead me to sin against chastity?
- Did I entertain immodest thoughts or consent to impure desires?

- Did I commit any impure actions by myself or with others?
- Was I prudent and reserved in dealing with people of the opposite sex, whether married or not?
- Did I engage in conversations or jokes that could lead myself and others to commit sins against purity?
- Did I engage in premarital sex?

*(For married people)*

- Was I faithful to my wife/husband, both in my thoughts and behavior?
- Did I take pills or use artificial means to avoid pregnancy?  
Did I encourage others to do so?
- Did I use marriage to express my selfless love for my wife/husband, or just to satisfy my sexual urges?

**7 & 10. You shall not steal.**

**You shall not covet your neighbor's property.**

- Was I respectful of other people's property?
- Did I damage public property?
- Did I steal anything?  
Did I return what I stole, or offer adequate compensation?
- Did I cheat in school or in business?  
Was I honest in my work, performing my duty in the best possible way?
- Was I fair in paying my employees, my taxes and other dues?
- Was I envious of other people's material means, or success?
- Did I waste time and opportunities?
- Was I greedy?
- Did I use natural resources selfishly?

**8. You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor.**

- Did I tell lies to defend my pride or to cause damage to others?
- Did I give false witness in court?
- Did I reveal secrets which had been confided to me?
- Did I reveal secret faults of others?
- Did I accuse someone falsely?
- Did I judge others rashly?
- Am I a biased person?
- Am I able to balance truth and charity?

## IMMEDIATELY BEFORE CONFESSION

- Humbly and sincerely ask the Lord's forgiveness and the grace you need to avoid sin in the future;
- try to identify the internal root causes of your sins: wrong inclinations, personal weaknesses, bad habits. . . and see what you can do to eliminate at least one of these "root causes." This means: resolve to work seriously at becoming a better person by either getting rid of one serious moral defect, or by strengthening one good moral quality (virtue);
- ask the Lord for the grace to make a sincere and thorough confession.

## DURING CONFESSION

Make the sign of the cross and say:

- *Bless me, Father, for I have sinned.*

Allow the priest to give you his blessing and to add whatever exhortation he may be inspired to offer. Listen prayerfully and with an open heart, then say:

- *My last good confession was . . . ago. Since then, I have committed the following sins: . .*

Confess your sins clearly and sincerely, starting with the most difficult or embarrassing ones.

Should you feel nervous, or uncertain about some sins, ask the priest to help you.

Remember that it is necessary to specify the *number* of mortal sins, together with the *circumstances* that add to their gravity.

When you have finished confessing all the sins that you remember, say:

- *For these sins and all the sins of my past life, especially the sins against . . . (mention the most important virtues, like charity, honesty, purity, etc.) I ask absolution and penance from you, Father.*

The confessor will give you some pertinent advice. He will also give you an appropriate penance to be performed after the sacrament of confession. At his invitation, recite an **Act of Contrition**.

You can say the Act of Contrition either in your own words, or by reciting the following or a similar one:

*O my God, I am heartily sorry  
for having offended you.  
I detest all my sins,  
because I dread the loss of heaven  
and the pains of hell;  
but most of all because they offend you,  
my God, who are all good  
and deserving of all my love.  
I firmly resolve, with the help of your grace,  
to sin no more, to do penance,  
and to amend my life. Amen.*

After having recited the Act of Contrition, bow your head and receive the priest's absolution with humility and gratitude. Follow his words attentively and join him in saying the closing "Amen!"

## AFTER CONFESSION

Kneel down in front of the altar or of an image of Our Lord, and thank him for the gift of this confession. Renew your resolutions and ask His help to overcome future temptations. With St. Dominic Savio repeat the prayer/commitment synthesized in the motto: **Death, rather than sin.**

If the penance given by the confessor consists in some prayers to be recited, say them quietly and devoutly.

Then smile at Jesus with gratitude. Rise joyful and confident for the Lord has been merciful to you. Live for Him every minute of your life, and let everybody see how wonderful it is to serve the Lord.

*The complete text of this leaflet, including the Biblical Readings, can be found in the pamphlet*

**"CONFESSION:  
THE WAY TO SPIRITUAL HEALING,  
GROWTH AND FREEDOM."**



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